

tinued augmentation of numbers. There is but one night watchman for the whole building, and there are no means by which he, without leaving the building, could raise a general alarm in case of his finding a fire, and when it is remembered that the process of liberation would have to be done upon three floors that are separated by locked doors, it is plain that the old man who acts as watchman would have his hands full to awaken the nine attendants on these three floors, and these attendants would require to be remarkably cool-headed to control the 260 lunatics and unlock the twelve corridor doors and the sixty cell doors."

And then, again :

"We find that the locks require several keys, and are, from long usage, difficult to open, and require several minutes when there is no cause for a panic. * * *

"The probabilities of the destruction of life in case of fire is further manifest, when it is remembered that upon the fourth floor are lodged between twenty and thirty paralytics, who could not help themselves easily ; that the whole building is very combustible and not at all fire-proof ; that the single watchman would, like enough, be in the beginning paralyzed in deciding to choose whether to attempt to get out the people or to put out the fire ; that there is not a fire plug, a foot of hose, or a fire extinguisher in the whole building ; and that in the upper stories there is no certain supply of water. To sum up, in a very combustible building with 260 lunatics and thirty disabled paralytics on the fourth floor, controlled by seventy-five locks with various keys, besides numerous latches, there is but one night watchman, and he is said to be infirm, to discover the fire and alarm the people, and there is no means provided to raise a general alarm. There are only nine attendants to control the patients and open the doors, no apparatus to extinguish the fires, and no one to use such an apparatus unless it be the lunatics themselves and some untutored employés, who, we believe, mainly sleep away from the wards."

The consulting staff proposed the necessary changes ; but their recommendations fell upon deaf ears. The result is well known to all. We suspect that the Blockley Almshouse is not the only institution in which such an accident could have occurred.

NEW YORK MEDICO-LEGAL SOCIETY.

In his retiring address as President of the Medico-Legal Society, Mr. Clark Bell gives a very gratifying report of the progress

made by the society. This progress is marked not only by the increase in membership and the growth of the society's library, but also by the character of the subjects discussed at, and the greater interest taken in, the meetings of the society. Through the *Medico-Legal Journal*, the mouth-piece of the society, the influence of the latter has been extended beyond the limits of this city and State.

The President referred in his address to the necessity of reforming the Lunacy Statutes of this state. He suggests that the Governor of New York appoint a commission (consisting of men able to decide on this question), who should be asked "to report such changes in our Lunacy Statutes as are demanded by the exigency of the times, and the needs of that defenceless class who, not able to speak for themselves, have all the higher claims on our sympathy, our care, and our protection." If the society will take active steps in this direction, it will merit the recognition which the energy of its late President secured for it at home and abroad.

Prof. R. Ogden Doremus, the newly-elected President of the Medico-Legal Society, will, no doubt, be willing to help bring about the reform suggested by his predecessor.

LEGISLATION FOR THE INSANE.

THIS is the present topic of discussion in England, France, Holland, and the United States. The people of the United States have a great tendency to believe in the possibility of enacting laws which will execute themselves, and it is the general opinion among Americans that they are natural-born experts on every thing. In the present number of this JOURNAL is reviewed a work on the subject of legislation for the insane whose object is commendable, but the author, Geo. L. Harrison, LL.D., should have studied a little psychiatry before writing the same. He says that a medical superintendent's testimony in a case which is reported as a case of incarceration of a sane man was trivial to absurdity. If Dr. Harrison had studied medicine or science he would know that the absolutely trivial does not exist. To legislate properly for the insane requires some knowledge of them, and it is to be regretted that a man of the philanthropical spirit of Dr. Harrison should enter upon this task without knowledge.